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DEMOCRACY AND MUSIC

By DANIEL GREGORY MASON

LOVERS and critics of modern music who are at the same time interested students of the social changes which have preceded and accompanied its growth must often ask themselves whether there is any deep connection of cause and effect between the two sets of phenomena, or whether they merely happened to take place at the same time. Have the important social transformations of the nineteenth century reached so far in their influence as to the music of our time? Has sociology any light to throw upon musical art? The question raises a problem as difficult as it is fascinating; and the suggestions which follow are to be taken as guesses and hints, intended to provoke fertile thought, rather than as constituting in any sense a finished theory.

I.

The change in the nature of the musical public that has taken place during the nineteenth century has been gradual but far-reaching. The essence of it is expressed by saying that at the end of the eighteenth century music was in the hands of the nobility and gentry, and that at the beginning of the twentieth it is in those of all the people. Under feudal conditions it was organized by the patronage system according to the tastes of the aristocratic few. The thirty most fruitful years of Haydn's life were spent in the employ of Prince Esterhazy; Mozart, a skilled pianist as well as composer, was fortunately less dependent on his patron, but his life was probably shortened by the hardships he had to face after he had broken with him; Beethoven, staunch democrat though he was, realized what he owed his four patrons, Archduke Rudolph and Princes Lobkowitz, Kinsky, and Lichnowsky, and wrote, after the deaths of some of them had reduced the value of his annuity: "In order to gain time for a great composition, I must always previously scrawl away a good deal for the sake of money . . . If my salary were not so far reduced as not to be a salary at all, I should write nothing but symphonies . . . and church music, or at most quartets." No doubt the patronage system had its faults and abuses, which have been quite adequately discussed by critics; the fact remains that under it was done the

supreme creative work of the golden age of music. Greater than any of its material advantages was the spiritual homogeneity of the group who practised it. By excluding the lower classes, however unjustly, they achieved, though artificially, a unity of feeling that could not then have been achieved otherwise; and as art is in essence an emotional reaction this unity of feeling provided a soil in which its seeds could grow.

But with the French revolution and the passing of feudalism this old order perished. The proclamation of liberty, equality, and fraternity, paving the way for individualistic competition, introduced the epoch of industrialism and capitalism, in which art, like everything else, was taken out of the hands of a privileged class, and made theoretically accessible to all. As the appreciation of art requires, however, mental and emotional experience, discipline, and refining, a process which takes time, what actually happened was that those gradually emerging from poverty through industrialism—the workers themselves and their children and grandchildren—availed themselves much more slowly and timidly of these spiritual privileges than of the material ones. There remained over from the feudal world a nucleus of cultivated people, sufficiently homogeneous in feeling to retain a standard of taste, sufficiently numerous to exert an influence on production: these were the guardians of the better traditions. They were gradually but steadily interpenetrated and overrun by the emergents, at first in a minority but rapidly becoming the majority, and remaining, of course, unavoidably far more backward in artistic feeling than in economic independence and social ambition. Thus was introduced a formidable cleavage in the musical public, the majority breaking off sharply by their child-like crudity from the more disciplined minority.

The situation was further complicated by the presence of a third class, the idle rich, becoming more numerous under capitalism. It may be doubted whether their attitude towards art was qualitatively different in any important respect from that of the frivolous nobility under feudalism. Both groups regarded music either with complete indifference or else as an amusement, a plaything, a fad; both exercised an influence which through its essential artificiality was potentially perhaps even more baleful than that of the honest crudity of what we have called the emergent class, though actually less disastrous because they were a small minority instead of the majority. But the contribution of this group to the confusion and disorganization characteristic of art under democracy was greater than that of the feudal nobles, because their relation

to society as a whole counted more. When they were placed by the emergence of the democratic majority in a vigorous opposition of attitude to the bulk of the people their influence no longer remained largely negative, but made positively for cleavage and disunion. Thus the unity of social emotion on which art so largely depends for a healthy universality was still further disrupted.

We find, then, under democracy, not a fairly homogeneous musical public with emotionally a single point of view, such as existed under feudalism, but a division into a well-meaning but crude majority and two minorities, one cultivated, the other frivolous: all three, but especially the two extremes, held apart by profound differences of feeling. Despite the inevitability and the desirability of democratization as the only path away from slavery, such a disorganization, even if temporary, must evidently, while it lasts, work serious injuries to art. It is worth while to try, taking frankly at first the attitude of the devil's advocate, to trace a few of the more striking of these injuries as they show themselves in contemporary music.

II.

Of the "emergents" who constitute the most novel element in the contemporary situation, the well-meaning but crude listeners who form a numerically overwhelming majority of our concert-goers, the effect may be described, in most general terms, as being to put a premium on all that is easily grasped, obvious, primitive, at the expense of the subtler, more highly organized effects of art—on sensation as against thought, on facile sentiment as against deep feeling, on extrinsic association as against intrinsic beauty. Mentally, emotionally, and æsthetically children, they naturally demand the child-like, if not the childish.

There seems to be something far deeper than accident in the coincidence of the rise about 1830, that is, about a generation after the French Revolution, under Berlioz and Liszt, of that program music which is generally acknowledged to be peculiarly characteristic of our period, with the invasion of concert-halls by masses of these child-like listeners, as eager for the stories that music might be made to suggest as they were unprepared to appreciate its more intrinsic beauties. They were drawn by the "program" before they grew up to the "music." Lacking the concentration needed to hold all but the simplest melodies together in their minds, pathetically incapable of the far greater range and precision of attention required to hear synthetically a complex work like an overture or a symphony, they were puzzled

or bored by Beethoven, and in their helplessness to follow a musical thread could only grope in the dark until they found a dramatic one. Such a clue in the labyrinth was the "program." They hailed it with the delight of the comparatively unmusical person in opera, who considers it the highest type of music because it supplies him with the largest apparatus of non-musical commentaries (scenery, gestures, words) on the music he cannot understand. Program music, a sort of idealized opera with scenery and actors left to the imagination, fulfilled the same indispensable service for the novice in the concert-room.

The immense popularity of the program idea, from that day to this, is evidence of its complete fitness to the needs of its audience. It says to them, in effect: "You have little 'ear' for music, and take no more joy in the highly organized melodies of a Beethoven symphony or a Bach fugue, with their infinite subtlety of tonal rhythmic relation-ships, than in the most trivial tunes. Never mind: I will give you two or three short motives, clearly labelled, that you cannot help recognizing. This one will mean 'love,' that 'jealousy,' that 'death,' and so on . . . You are not fascinated by, because you are unable to follow, the creative imagination by which such masters as these build whole worlds of musical beauty out of a few simple themes—an imagination as truly creative as that which carried Newton from the falling apple to the law of gravitation, or directed the infinite patient delving in detail of a Pasteur or a Darwin. Never mind. Remember the story, and you will know that during the love scene the composer must be developing the 'love' motive . . . You are even more indifferent to the broader balance of part with part, the symmetry and coöperation of all in the whole, harder to grasp just as the concinnity of a Greek temple as a whole is harder to feel than the charm of a bit of sculpture here or the texture of the marble there. Never mind. I will give you a structure in sections, like a sky-scraper. Section will follow section as event follows event in the plot . . . In short, the story shall be 'All you know, and all you need to know.' It shall be a straw that will keep you from drowning as the inundation of the music passes over you, and that will save you the trouble of learning to swim."

Of course, this does not mean that music of a high order cannot be associated with a program, or that the two cannot be not only coexistent but fruitfully coöperative. They are so in many a representative modern work—in Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration," for instance, or d'Indy's "Istar," or Dukas's "L'Apprenti Sorcier," or Rachmaninoff's "Island of the Dead."

What is meant is that the program idea derives both its popularity and its peculiar menace in large measure from the stress it places on the appeal to something outside music—to association, that is—at the expense of the appeal to music itself, and thus from the official sanction it seems to give to what is essentially an unmusical conception of music. The program school of composers is the first school that has not merely tolerated but encouraged, elaborated, and rationalized the conviction of the unmusical that music is to be valued chiefly not for itself, but for something else. How dangerous such a compromise with the majority may be, both to public taste and to the composer, is startlingly, not to say tragically, illustrated by the steady tendency of the greatest master of the school, Richard Strauss, to become more and more trivially “realistic” with each new work, and by the complaisance of the public in paying him vast sums of money for thus progressively corrupting it. In every one of his symphonic poems, from the exuberant “Don Juan” (1888) to the surprisingly banal “Alpensymphonie” (1915), glorious pages of music have alternated with silly tricks of imitation, as for instance the splendid development of the husband theme in the “Symphonia Domestica” with the bawling of the baby; but in the latest we have the maximum of imitation and the minimum of music. Apart from their gorgeous orchestral dress its themes are with few exceptions commonplace, dull, and pretentious. Except in one or two passages they are not imaginatively or significantly developed. On the other hand there is no end of “tone-painting,” much of it a revamping of the distant-hunting-horns, rustling-leaves, and warbling-bird-calls which have been time-worn theatrical properties of music ever since Raff’s “Im Walde” and Wagner’s “Waldweben;” some of it more original, like the pictures of sunrise and sunset with which the work begins and ends. In these associatively vivid but musically amorphous passages melody, harmony, rhythm, key disappear in a strange opaque cloud of tone, realistically representing night—the kind of night to which the German wit compared Hegel’s Absolute—“in which all cows are black.” The same childish realism which made Wagner show us his dragon on the stage instead of in our own imaginations introduces a wind-machine in the storm and sheep bells in the mountain pasture. In all this we see an artist who was once capable of writing the introduction and coda of “Death and Transfiguration” taking his art into the nursery to play games with.

But the effect of music on child-like audiences, indisposed to active mental effort and all for taking music passively like a kind

of tonal Turkish bath, reaches its logical extreme not in the program music of which Strauss is the most famous exponent, but in that superficially different but fundamentally related movement known as impressionism, which is led by the other most discussed composer of our day, Debussy. Strikingly contrasted as are these two leaders of contemporary music in temperament, in artistic aims, in technical methods, their æsthetic theories are at one in the slight demands they make on the attention of an inevitably inattentive public. Both encourage the listener to look away from the music itself to something that it suggests to him. But impressionism goes further than programmism. May not those people, it says, who find organic melody, development, and form fatiguing, and to whom you give a program to help them out—may they not find the program fatiguing, too? May not its being prescribed offend their sense of “freedom”? Why exact of them the effort to follow even the story? Better to give them simply a title, as vague and elusive as possible, and foster the mood of day-dreaming thus suggested by avoiding all definite melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic features in the music, while enhancing its purely sensuous charm to the utmost degree possible. Such, carried out with extraordinary talent, is the artistic creed of Debussy. Just as programmism appeals from music to association, impressionism appeals to sentiment, to fancy, and to the phantasmagoric reveries upon which they are ever so ready to embark.

It is noteworthy, moreover, that both programmism and impressionism, however systematically they may minimize their demands on the intelligence of their audience, do not abate, but rather tend constantly to increase, their ministration to its sense. Indeed, they systematically maximize their sensuous appeal; and though their characteristic methods of making this appeal differ as widely as their general attitudes, that of programmism being extensive and that of impressionism intensive, the insistence of both on sensuous rather than on intellectual or emotional values is surely one of the most indicative, and it may be added one of the most disquieting, symptoms of the condition of modern music.

The method of the program school in general, and of Strauss in particular, is extensive in that it aims at boundless piling up of means, a formidable accumulation of sonorities for the besieging of the ear. Its motto is that attributed to the German by the witty Frenchman: “Plenty of it.” Berlioz, the pioneer of the movement, with his “mammoth orchestras,” and his prescription, in his requiem, of four separate brass bands, one at

each corner of the church, and eight pairs of kettle-drums in addition to bass drum, gong, and cymbals; Mahler, commencing a symphony with a solo melody for eight horns; Strauss, with his twelve horns behind the scenes in the "Alpensymphonie," to say nothing of wind-machine, thunder-machine, sheep bells, and a whole regiment of more usual instruments:—all these disciples of the extensive or quantitative method aim to dazzle, stun, bewilder, and overwhelm. They can be recognized by their abuse of the brass and percussion groups, their child-like faith that if a noise is only loud enough it becomes noble. They have a tendency, too, to mass whole groups of instruments on a single "part," as Tschai-kowsky, for instance, so often does with his strings, whatever the sacrifice of interesting detail, for the sake of brilliance and *éclat*. To some extent, of course, all this is justified, even necessitated, by the vast size of modern concert-halls; but a candid observer can hardly deny that it is systematically overdone in the interests of sensationalism. The same tendency is observable also in other than orchestral music. The piano, treated with such admirable restraint by Chopin and by Debussy, has been forced by Liszt and his followers toward jangling, crashing sonorities that can penetrate the most callous sensorium. The equipment of organs with "solo stops" and other devices for the tickling of idle ears has turned the king of instruments too often into a holiday harlequin. Even the string quartet, last rallying-ground of music against the ubiquitous onslaught of sensationalism, begins in many modern scores, with their constant double stops and tremolos, and their "effects" of mutes, pizzicato, "ponticello," "col legno," and the rest, to sound like a rather poor, thin orchestra, striving for a variety and fulness of color beyond its capacity.

The fallacy of the extensive method is that it is trying to satisfy a craving essentially insatiable. Such an appetite for mere quantity of sound grows by what it feeds on; luxury breeds ennui; and, as every sensualist knows to his sorrow, there never can be "plenty of it." A sense of this futility inherent in the extensive method as it has been practised in modern Germany and elsewhere has led another school, chiefly modern French, to try for similar results by a different method, which may be called the intensive. Such a composer as Debussy, who may here be taken as typical, aims, to be sure, primarily at sensuous rather than at mental or spiritual values, but achieves them by qualitative refinement and contrast rather than by quantitative accumulation, and avoids exaggeration in favor of a delicate, almost finical, understatement and suggestiveness. While sonority is as much his god as

Strauss's, he is the connoisseur of subtle, elusive sonorities, each to be sipped like a wine of rarest bouquet, rather than an enthusiast of the full-bodied brew. The subtlety of the methods often leads his admirers to claim a superior "spirituality" in the aims, but this is a mistake. His school is more spiritual than Strauss's only as a *gourmet* is more spiritual than a glutton. Both schools prefer sensation to thought and emotion, association to intrinsic beauty, color to line. The difference is that "Pelléas et Mélisande" is the violet or ultra-violet end of the spectrum of which "Salome" is the red.

A curious bye-product of the cult of the elusive sonority is the exaggerated, the almost morbid, interest that has emanated from modern France in novelty of harmonic idiom. One would suppose, to read many contemporary critics, that the sole criterion of a good composer depended on his use of some recondite scheme of harmony, whether based on the whole-tone scale, on the mediæval modes, on new applications of chromaticism, on the "harmonic polyphony" of Casella and others, or on the arbitrary asperities of the Italian noise-makers and Mr. Leo Ornstein. If you wish to be considered an "ultra-modernist" you may do quite as you please, both as regards commission and omission, in rhythm, melody, polyphony, form, provided only you are harmonically eccentric. This insistence on harmony, on the momentary tone-combination, suggests a predominant concern with the sensuous side of music which is highly significant as a symptom. It is a stressing of that which the senses alone can perceive from moment to moment, without any aid from memory, imagination, comparison, and other mental acts required for the perception of rhythm and melody. In short, it is an evidence of the same materialistic tendency to rely on the physical rather than the mental appeal, on the investiture of the idea rather than on the idea itself, which we noted in the extensive method. Whatever their differences, both methods are thus at one in the tendency to use materials as makeshifts for thought. Mahler failing to get with eight horns the effect that Schubert got with two—plus a great melodic idea—at the opening of his C Major Symphony, Debussy confectioning a banal bit of tune in muted string or pastoral flute sonorities with piquant harmonies—both are appealing, with varying success, from our minds and hearts to our auditory nerves. The increasing measure of success attending such appeals shows vividly the numerical advantage that the hungry or curious auditory nerves have, in the modern democratic audience, over the enlightened minds and hearts.

III.

And indeed, how should we expect it to be otherwise? Enlightened minds and hearts, we must remember, are the finest and rarest fruit of civilization, to be cultivated only under conditions of decent leisure, fair physical and mental health, and free association with "the best that has been done and thought in the world." When they are so rare even in the class that has all these advantages, how shall we expect them to be common among those living either in an industrial servitude that for monotony of toil is almost worse than chattel slavery, or by clerical and other secondary work that through the modern specialization and subdivision of labor condemns each individual to a more or less mechanical repetition of a few small acts through the larger part of his working hours, a routine the relation of which to human life as a whole he often does not see? Writers on sociology are beginning to realize¹ that such conditions of work inevitably produce a morbid psychological condition in the worker, dulling his mind by the meaningless drudgery and depressing his body and nerves by fatigue-poisons, so that even in his few hours of leisure his perfectly natural seeking for pleasure does not take entirely normal paths. Too exhausted to respond to delicate shades and subtle relationships, whether in sensuous or mental objects, his jaded nerves cry out for violent stimuli, for contrasts, for something to goad and whip them into new activity. This craving for violent stimuli is the essential feature of the fatigue-psychology. Now, is it not highly suggestive that the age of industrialism is also the age of a hundred goads for tired nerves—of the newspaper headline, the dime-novel and "penny-thriller," the lurid moving-picture drama, rag-time and the "revue?" And is it not possible that the sensationalism of so much modern music is only another evidence, on a somewhat higher plane, of the working of this same psychology of fatigue?

Again, these overworn nerves of ours have within a comparatively short period had brought to bear upon them, through the progress of modern invention with its cheap printing, quick transportation, and long distance communication, a thousand distractions. No longer insulated from the outlying world, so to speak, by time and space, as were our more simply-living ancestors, we read, hear, and see as much in a day as they did in a week. The inevitable result has been a diffusion of attention fatal to

¹See, for example, "The Great Society", by Graham Wallas, and "Work and Wealth", by J. A. Hobson.

concentrated thought except for the most resolute, breeding in the average man mental indigestion and habits of disorder and impatience, and gradually evolving the characteristic modern type—quick, sharp, and shallow. Outward distraction has thus added its influence to inner weariness to urge our art away from quiet thought towards ever noisier solicitation. For thought always depends on simplification, on inhibition: in order to think we must neglect, as we see strikingly in the case of the absent-minded, the given-by-sense in order to attend to the given-by-memory-and-imagination; and over-stimulation of sense is therefore just as hostile to thought as the depression of the higher mental faculties through fatigue. Thus it is highly characteristic of our prevailing attitude that we strive, not for elimination, but for accumulation, distraction, dissipation. The formula is always mental apathy, physical and nervous excitement. Not having the joy of the mastery which comes only through thought, because we lack both concentration and favorable opportunity to discipline ourselves, we seek the stimulus of constant change. We digest nothing, taste everything; “eclecticism” is our euphemism for spreading our attention very wide and very thin; and the nightmare that you soon uncover under all our art is not that our minds may become bewildered (for that they are already), but that our senses may become jaded—which of course they do.

Still another line of influence that may be traced from general modern conditions to the peculiar qualities of modern art concerns especially the third of the classes described above, the capitalist class. Here again we find a morbid condition, a distortion of wholesome human contacts; but here instead of the impediment of meaningless drudgery, it is the incubus of a fruitless, selfish idleness. Cut off from the normal outlet of energy in useful work, the luxurious classes become pampered and bored, and develop through very vacuity a perverted taste for the unusual, the queer, the generally upside down and backside, too. Every season sees a new crop of the “isms” thus produced, the ephemera of the world of art, which live a day and die as soon as they lose their one interest, novelty. Of all manifestations of so-called “art” they are the most sterile, the most completely devoid of vital relation to any real impulse. They might be ignored did they not complicate still further an already complicated situation, and were they not an additional, though a largely negative, illustration of the close causative relation between general social conditions and artistic expression that our discussion is making more and more evident. Fortunately they produce little enduring effect

beyond their own narrow circles; for as they spring not from any vital interest, but only from an unguided curiosity and desire for excitement, they take mutually opposing forms and largely cancel each other. Thus, for instance, fads for very old or for very new music, directed as they are toward the mere age or the mere newness, and having no concern with the quality of the music itself, leave the actual public taste just where it would have been had they never arisen. Nevertheless, the diversion of so much energy, which might under better conditions find an outlet in fruitful activity, to a sterile posture-making, is uneconomical and to be regretted.

So far, we have been looking chiefly, from the point of view of the devil's advocate, at the injurious influences on contemporary music that can be traced with some degree of plausibility to the capitalistic and industrial social system of the nineteenth century. Noting the sensational bent, whether extensively or intensively expressing itself, of the chief contemporary schools, we have asked ourselves whether it could be attributed in some measure to the kind of demand made by an audience dulled by overwork at monotonous tasks and depressed by fatigue-poisons. Remarking the multiplicity of fads and "isms" by which our art is confused, we have asked how far these might be attributed to the cravings of a group whose normal appetites have been perverted by luxury and self-centred isolation. All of these evils, we have insisted, are aggravated in their effects by the distractions under which we live. It is now time, however, taking a more positive view and attempting a more constructive theory, to ask how these evils may be combatted, what more hopeful elements already exist in the situation, and what others may be expected to develop in the future.

IV.

First of all, it may be suggested that, so far as these evils are fairly attributable to the social conditions of the nineteenth century, they may fairly be expected to be mitigated somewhat by those changes which already seem probable in those of the twentieth. The capitalistic era seems likely to be followed by an era of coöperation or communism; and in countless ways such a change must eventually be deeply revivifying to all forms of art. Of course, it is only too easy to indulge in baseless dreams of the results upon art of a millennium brought about in this way, only too easy to forget that we are only at the threshold of such new systems of

organization, and that they may go the wrong way instead of the right. All we can safely say is that if they do go the right way they will rescue art, among many other human interests, from the condition to which much of it has been prostituted under capitalism.

Let us suppose, for instance, that something like what Mr. H. G. Wells calls the Great State,¹ eventually results from the troublous reconstructions through which we are living. The Great State is only one of three possibilities he sees in the further adjustment of the leisure class and the labor class of our present order. The first possibility (and a disagreeably vivid one it must seem to all thoughtful Americans) is that "the leisure class may degenerate into a waster class," and the labor class "may degenerate into a sweated, overworked, violently resentful and destructive rebel class," and that a social *débâcle* may result. The second possibility is that the leisure class "may become a Governing Class (with waster elements) in an unprogressive Bureaucratic Servile State," in which the other class appears as a "controlled, regimented, and disciplined Labour Class." The third possibility is that the leisure class "may become the whole community of the Great State, working under various motives and inducements, but not constantly, nor permanently, nor unwillingly," while the labor class is "rendered needless by a general labour conscription, together with a scientific organization of production, and so re-absorbed by re-endowment into the Leisure Class of the Great State."

The first two of these possible conditions would be fatal to art, one through anarchy and loss of standards, the other through conventionalization. The third would bring about a renaissance, after a troubled period of conflicting standards and of readjustments such as we find ourselves in to-day. The main elements in such a progress would be, first, the gradual refining, deepening, and vitalizing of the taste of the general public under the influence of increasing leisure, health, self-respect, and education; second, the cutting off of extravagance, luxury, and faddism in the wealthier classes by a wholesome pressure of enforced economy; third, increasing solidarity of feeling in the whole social fabric through such a mutual *rapprochement*, giving the indispensable emotional basis for vital art.

There are already some encouraging evidences of such developments. Much preparatory work towards the formation of better

¹"Social Forces in England and America," by H. G. Wells, New York and London, 1914.

standards of public taste has been unobtrusively done, at least in our larger cities, by free lectures and cheap recitals and concerts. Two disadvantages, however, have often attended such work, reducing its benefits. One has come from the common fallacy that what is done for the many must be done so as to please the many—a view often supposed to be “democratic.” Emerson was more truly democratic when he told us to “cease this idle prating about the masses,” and set about extracting individuals from the masses; for real democracy never forgets that the majority are always inferior, and its aim must be to give the superior minority a chance to make their influence felt. In other words, to level down to the people is to vulgarize rather than to popularize. Theodore Thomas set a model for the conductor of popular concerts in the best sense, for all time, when he replied to one of his orchestra players who said that people did not like Wagner: “Then we must play him until they do.”

The second disadvantage is even harder to avoid, even for administrators of the highest standards, because it seems to be almost intrinsic in this kind of work. It comes from the passive nature of the people's participation. Giving even the best concerts seems often too much like handing the people music at the end of a stick—“Take it or leave it;” naturally, having so little choice in its selection, they often leave it; and even when they try their best to take it, they cannot get so much out of it as if they were actively helping to produce it. This is the reason that more active forms of music-making, even if crude, like the music school settlement work and the community choruses that have been making such strides in recent years, seem so full of promise. The singing in the public schools, too, would have done far more than it has, had not the standards been debased, as Mr. T. W. Surette has ably shown,¹ to the childish tastes, not of the children themselves, who could appreciate better things, but of their dull and routine-enslaved elders. Yet here again we must beware of a too easy optimism. There is no magic about the community chorus that can suddenly change bad taste to good. Too often we seem here, as in all other activities for popularizing music, to oscillate helplessly between two evils. On the one hand is the crudity of actual taste: the majority prefer rag-time and the musical comedies to folk-songs or the simple classics. On the other hand is the apathy that comes of prescription from outsiders: muical activity that is not spontaneous is sterile. Progress

¹ In an article on Public-School Music, *Atlantic Monthly*, December, 1916.

seems to come painfully and uncertainly from a constant zigzagging between these two evils, getting gradually away from them as the taste of the minority exercises its persuasiveness.

As for the wealthier classes, it must be confessed that there are so far few evidences of any permanent displacement of luxury and artificiality by saner and simpler tastes. Yet there are even here one or two hopeful signs, of which the most conspicuous is the recent enthusiasm for folk-songs. This is rather too good to be altogether true. It is hard to believe in the complete sincerity of those who go into the same rhapsodies over a perfectly simple and rather crude peasant song that a year or two ago they reserved for the exquisite day-dreams of Debussy or the exotic inconsequentialities of Cyril Scott. Moreover, the appreciation of folk-song, though a normal and indeed indispensable stage in musical education, is only the very first phase of initiation to the deeper and subtler beauties of musical art, and not a stage to be dwelt in with complacency. Yet so far as it goes, and in the measure of its sincerity, the interest in folk-song is of good augury. It means concern with melody, always and everywhere the soul of music, rather than with externalities like orchestral color, or harmonic "effects," or quasi-poetic associations and programs. It means sympathy with simple and broadly human, universal emotions, such as inspire the greatest as well as such primitive music. It may mean the beginning of a real and eventually a developed taste for good music. And it is a good foundation for such a *rapprochement* of all classes of music-lovers as may come, we may hope, with the coming of the Great State.

If our cursory examination of the general tendencies of our day reveals no striking preponderance of good over bad, shows us no movement of any majority that we can acclaim without qualification, we may now remind ourselves for our comfort that this has always been the case in all times, and that there is indeed a curious illusion, resolvable only by close scrutiny, that makes our own time seem worse to us, in comparison with others, than it really is. We have to remember that the baser elements of our own time make a much greater impression on us, in relation to the finer ones, than those of the past. A living fool can make as much noise as a wise man (if not far more); a dead one is silent forever. The gold of Beethoven's day, of which he was himself the purest nugget, comes down to us bright and untarnished, so that we forget all the dross that has been thrown on the scrap-heap of time. Our own gold is almost hidden from us by the glitter of the tinsel.

The world of music, says Sir Charles Stanford¹, is not substantially different from what it has been. It has always exalted those of its contemporary composers who dealt in frills and furbelows above those who considered the body more important than its clothes. Only a few wise heads knew of the existence of Bach. Rossini was rated by the mass of the public far higher than Weber, Spohr than Beethoven, Meyerbeer than Wagner. Simrock said that he made Böhm pay for Brahms.

It is always necessary to wait for the winnowing process of time before we can see the true proportions of an age. Hence we can never see our own age in its true proportions, and since the second- and third-rate elements in it are ever more acclaimed by the majority than the first-rate, we always see it worse than it is. We live, so to speak, in the glare of noon-day, and cannot see the true coloring of our world, which will appear only at evening. Hence in every age the tragi-comedy is repeated of acclaiming the mediocre and the meretricious, and ignoring worth. The Gounods always patronize the Francks. The answer of philosophy is Emerson's:

Ideas impregnable: numbers are nothing. Who knows what was the population of Jerusalem? 'Tis of no importance whatever. We know that the Saint and a handful of people held their great thoughts to the death; and the mob resisted and killed him; and, at the hour, fancied they were up and he was down; when, at that very moment, the fact was the reverse. The principles triumphed and had begun to penetrate the world. And 'tis never of any account how many or how rich people resist a thought.

Our final question, then, resolves itself to this: Are there in the music of our day, known or unknown to the majority, any such vital "thoughts," based on principles that a discerning criticism may see even now to have "triumphed and begun to penetrate the world?" Is there music being written to-day which is modern, not through its pampering to jaded sense or dulled intelligence, but through its intuition and expression of the deeper emotional experience and spiritual aspiration of our time? Is there music, in short, not only seductive to the ear but beautiful to the mind? To answer such a question intelligently we shall have to take account of certain truths which the foregoing discussion has tended to establish, and which may now be made explicit. Thought, emotion, all that we call the spiritual side of music, expresses itself not through sonorous or harmonic effects, primarily sensuous in appeal, but through melody and rhythm and their interplay and elaboration in so-called thematic development.

¹ Pages from an Unwritten Diary, C. V. Stanford.

In truly great music we remember, not such and such a bit of tone-color, not this or that sonority, but the soaring or tender curve of the themes, their logical yet ever new unfolding, their embodiment, in the whole composition, of richest variety with completest final unity. The man in the street is absolutely right in feeling that music succeeds or fails by its tunes; his limitation arises in his conception of "tune."

Again, since the creation and manipulation of great "tunes" or themes, unlike the hitting off of sonorous effects or the discovery of *rococo* harmonies, comes never by luck, but only through a discipline based on the assimilation of all that is best in music, we always find that all really fine music is firmly founded upon tradition, and reaches its roots into the past, while blossoming, so to speak, into the future. The artist, despite the popular supposition to the contrary, depends on his forerunners quite as closely as the scientist. You can no more write a solid sonata without knowing Beethoven than you can work efficiently in biology in ignorance of Darwin. Yet on the other hand this assimilation of the past has to produce, not an academic and sterile complacency with what is, but an equipped and curious advance upon what is to be: the artist, like the scientist, brings all his learning to the test in acts of creative imagination, leaps in the dark. Thus artistic advance may be figured as like the shooting of frost crystals on a window pane; never is there a crystal that is not firmly attached by traceable lines to the main body; yet no one can prophesy whither each fine filament may strike out in its individual adventure. The great artist is bound to the past by love and docility. to the future by a faith that overleaps convention.

Looked at in the light of these considerations, contemporary music presents a scheme of light and shade somewhat different from that ordinarily accepted. If some high lights are overshadowed, others seem to shine brighter. There is plenty of hopeful promise for the future. Leaving aside the sounder elements in Strauss and Debussy, in whom there is so much of the richness of decay, we shall find the chief centres of truly creative activity perhaps in three composers who in their differing ways and degrees carry on the great tradition: Rachmaninoff in Russia, Elgar in England, and d'Indy in France. Each of these men reaches back roots to the primal sources of musical life—Bach and Beethoven: Rachmaninoff through Tchaikowsky, the eclectic Elgar through Mendelssohn, Brahms, Wagner and others, and d'Indy through Wagner and Franck. Each, as we see in such modern classics as "Toteninsel," the A flat Symphony, and "Istar," can create, in

settings of modern opulence of color, nobly beautiful forms, melodies that live and soar in a spiritual heaven. All, too, though in varying degrees, move on as a creator should toward the unknown. Here the Frenchman has perhaps, with his characteristic lucidity and logic, something the advantage of the more sensuous Slav and the more convention-beset Anglo-Saxon. Rachmaninoff, for all his warmth, does not always escape the vulgarity of Tschai-kowsky, and Elgar cannot always forget the formulæ of oratorio. But in d'Indy, with his untrammelled experimental attitude toward all modern possibilities, we have an influence destined steadily to grow and already clearly suggesting a new epoch combining the best of the old ways with new ones at which we can for the present only guess.